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Prologue

“He will be here soon.”

“I know, and we have no idea what to tell him!”

“Or if it's even the right time to tell him.”

The three cats talked in hushed whispers as the stars reflected upon the lake. The scent of prey was all around them as other cats hunted and played and laughed. But these three cats were oblivious to everything going on around them. They have been having this same discussion for the last moon, ever since they learned of what was going to unfold.

“I'm positive that this is the time that we tell him. You know how he is. He needs time to accept the idea.” The she-cat nodded her head confidently, daring the other two to argue with her.

The she-cat to her left bared her yellowed fangs. “No one is going to argue with you, but how do we even approach him with this? You know what he is like to talk to. He'll gripe and moan and dismiss us before we even have a chance to make a point! His attitude has gotten much worse since the battle with the Dark Forest, if that is even possible!”

The third cat sat quietly as the other two discussed the situation, keeping his thoughts to himself for the most part. Although he was highly respected by the other two he still felt as though he was a newcomer here and did not want to rub any cat’s fur the wrong way.

The blue-gray she-cat stared at her, her blue eyes shining brightly as she spoke. “We approach him with the truth. There have been too many lies, and too many withheld truths. He has been hurt by it and mistrusts us because of it. The only way to make him listen is by being as forthright as we can be.”

“The truth? From us? That is a novel idea. He won’t buy it.” She spat as she replied before raising her flattened face to the moon. “It is nearly moon-high.”

She nodded her head. “He won’t buy it. Not from us. That is why he will tell him.” She gestured to the cat sitting next to her, catching him by surprise.

He looked between the both of them before he spoke. “Me? Are you sure? You two have much more experience with this.”

His former leader and mentor bowed her head as she spoke. “It is your time. Each great leader has their opportunity to guide their clan. I have had my time, and now it is your turn.”

For once the other she-cat did not have a harsh response. She also bowed her head before turning away and walking into the trees. “Good luck,” she called back, adding with a laugh “You’re going to need it.”

He rolled his eyes before looking back at Bluestar. “I feel like I just arrived. Don’t feel like you have to back off now. Our clan still needs your guidance. *I* still need your guidance.”

She rested her muzzle on the top of his head. “I am not going anywhere. I will walk beside you for as long as I can. But it is your time. And to be honest with you, I am looking forward to watching you be the one to argue with Yellowfang for a change.” She purred with laughter as he mocked a face of shock before smiling.

“I can hear you whispering back there, you know,” came a voice from beyond the brush. “If I came all this way just to sit by myself then perhaps next moon I will stay in my warm den and enjoy the peace and quiet.”

“It is time,” she said, wrapping her tail around him before walking away.

He nodded and took a deep breath before walking out of the brush to meet the ThunderClan medicine cat. Even though he knew that his kin could see in his dreams, it was still a thrill to see his

blue eyes focus on him and recognition light his face. “Sorry to keep you waiting, Jayfeather.”

“Firestar?” The puzzled look on the small, pale gray tabby made it obvious that he was expecting either Bluestar or Yellowfang.

“I take it you were expecting somebody else? I hope you aren’t too terribly disappointed that I am the one to come here to greet you today.” He couldn’t help but purr as he approached him. Despite his often surly demeanor he had a deep love for his daughter’s son.

Jayfeather shook his head as he moved forward to meet him. “Of course not, Firestar. I suppose I just assumed that Yellowfang would be waiting to give me what she considers to be wisdom. You are definitely an upgrade.”

He was tempted to cuff the grouchy medicine cat with his paw and tell him to be nice but he had a much more important message to deliver. “Walk with me, Jayfeather. As much as I would like this to be a social visit I do have an important message to give to you. And I hope that you will be open-minded when you receive it.”

Jayfeather walked along beside him, his ears perked and a surprising spring in his step. “Has there been another prophecy? Is there danger? What do I have to do?”

Firestar laughed and shook his head. “Slow down, it is nothing that exciting. My message to you is simple. Important, but simple. Jayfeather, you must take on an apprentice.”

Jayfeather stopped in his tracks. Everything around him seemed to quiet down in expectation of his response. The light breeze had died down. The sounds of scurrying prey disappeared. All traces of laughter and playing deep in the forest ceased. But instead of a biting comment or a yowl of disapproval, a loud laugh came from the medicine cat. “An apprentice? *That* is what you have to tell me? Thanks, but no thanks.”

Firestar circled around him, preventing him from turning and

walking away. “This is no joke, Jayfeather. It's imperative that you find yourself an apprentice.”

The brief look of amusement faded from his face as he shook his head once more and tried to get past the StarClan cat. “No. I do not need one. Leafpool is a skilled medicine cat even if she isn’t one officially. And Brightheart has always filled in admirably when need be. And even Briarlight can help in a pinch. ThunderClan has plenty of cats able to treat wounds and fetch herbs. We don’t need another.”

Firestar’s green eyes blazed as he responded. “I didn’t say that ThunderClan needed one. I said that *you* need one.”

Jayfeather stopped trying to get past Firestar and gazed into his eyes. “Are you telling me that I am going to die soon?”

The ginger tom sat down, his feature softening as he responded. “No, I am not prophesizing your death. I am telling you that it is very important that you have an apprentice. The right apprentice. And you will know who it is when it is time. Don’t ignore this, Jayfeather. Please.”

Jayfeather regarded him for a moment before shaking his head and stalking off angrily. “I don’t want an apprentice. I don’t need an apprentice. And I don’t need StarClan. I can do everything myself. I always have and I always will.”

Two she-cats approached from behind as Firestar watched the independent medicine cat walk away. “Well, that could have gone better,” sneered the first. “We expected this response, Yellowfang,” responded the second. Firestar simply purred as the two cats continued to argue. “I've missed that cat.”

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

Jayfeather awoke to the sounds of cats screeching and yowling, not the way he would have liked to have been aroused. He turned his head towards the sound of the noise and realized that there were no cats in agony, but there were definitely some cats that were about to be in a heap of trouble.

“Briarlight!” he screeched. “What on earth are you doing to cause such a racket this early in the morning?”

Briarlight looked over her shoulder, her eyes twinkling with amusement. “It’s not *that* early, Jayfeather. The rest of the clan has been up and moving around for a while now.”

Amberpaw peeked around Briarlight, quickly averting her eyes when she thought Jayfeather was looking at her, completely forgetting for a moment that the blind medicine cat couldn’t see, he just had an uncanny gift to make eye contact when addressing you. “Sorry Jayfeather, we were just playing.”

Dewpaw bounded around the couple, a ball of moss in his mouth. He dropped it in front of Jayfeather and purred. “Briarlight is the best at moss-ball! She can throw it clear across the clan while lying down! And she said she needs the exercise so we figured it was our duty to help her stay active!” He nosed the ball closer to Jayfeather. “Do you want to play with us?”

Jayfeather scoffed as he batted the ball away. “No I do not want to play with you! If you want to play you should be playing somewhere else.”

Amberpaw approached Jayfeather slowly. “We didn’t want to disturb the kits.”

“Oh, StarClan forbid the kits are disturbed,” Jayfeather

spoke sarcastically, “it’s not like they won’t be keeping the rest of up and being underfoot for the next few moons. And aren’t you two too old to be playing? You are going to be made warriors soon.”

Amberpaw and Dewpaw along with their brother Snowpaw have been apprentices for nearly six moons and were sure to be given their warrior names soon. The whole clan was excited to see Cloudtail’s and Brightheart’s kits be made warriors, but all Jayfeather could think about was losing moss-fetchers.

Briarlight pushed herself up on her strong front paws and beckoned the apprentices. “Come on; let’s go see if there is anything left on the fresh-kill pile and get out of Jayfeather’s fur.” The other cats left as Briarlight dragged herself towards the entrance. “Would you like me to bring you something, Jayfeather?”

Jayfeather shook his head as he stretched. “No, I will grab something later. I suppose I will go check on the kits now that I am up.”

Briarlight nodded but cocked her head as she eyes Jayfeather. “Alright, but don’t forget to eat. You are looking rather thin lately.”

“I will eat when I am hungry,” he responded gruffly as he turned to look through his herbs, pretending to look busy in hope that Briarlight would get the hint and just leave him be. He felt a little guilty about being sharp with her but he was not in the mood to listen to other cats today. It wasn’t Briarlight’s fault that she had to stay in his medicine den with him but having a cat around him most of the time was not what he would call an ideal situation. And if this was bad, imagine what having an apprentice would be like.

It had been a couple of moons since his talk with Firestar, and to his great relief, no cat in StarClan has mentioned the need of an apprentice again. His last trip too the Moon Pool gave him the wonderful insight that it was going to be a mild leaf-bare because Yellowfang could “feel it in her bones.” Of course Jayfeather silently questioned weather or not she had actual bones in StarClan, just as he questioned just about every other word that said to him lately. More and more he clung to the words that Mothwing, the

RiverClan Medicine Cat that doesn't even believe in StarClan, said to him a while back. StarClan is nothing but a bunch of Dead Cats.

Jayfeather poked his head into the nursery and nearly collided with Daisy as she was leaving. "Oh, Jayfeather you startled me!" she exclaimed. "I was just on my way to fetch some fresh-kill for Cinderheart. She definitely has a healthy appetite! I remember when Sorreltail had her last two. She wasn't hungry for a week! We had to practically force a small mouse into her!"

"Yes, yes, I am sure it is a heartwarming story, Daisy, but I don't have time. I just wanted to go check on the kits before I go out to fetch some catmint," he lied. Daisy always seemed to get extra chatty when there were new kits around.

"Oh, I see. I will just be on my way then," she replied meekly. Jayfeather sighed as she walked away, feeling a little guilty about being short with her, but that feeling didn't last long because soon he was practically bowled over by his brother.

"Aren't they just beautiful?! Just look how beautiful they are! And perfect! Perfectly beautiful! Aren't they?" Lionblaze was never one to keep his emotions bottled up, and this morning he had definitely let his emotions be known to any cat within hearing distance. "Come look at them! We named them! Their names are perfect!"

Jayfeather followed Lionblaze in, his whiskers keeping contact with Lionblaze's tail so that he wouldn't step anywhere that he shouldn't. He could hear Cinderheart shifting as he neared. "Good morning, Jayfeather," she purred sleepily. "Have you come to check on my kits?"

"I have," he replied, leaning his nose in towards the sound of their suckling. He pressed his nose softly against the first one, feeling it wiggle as it fed from Cinderheart.

"That one is Hollykit," Lionblaze stated proudly. Her fur is so dark, just like Hollyleaf's. We thought it would be nice to honor her this way."

Jayfeather could feel his brother's breath on his fur as he leaned in

to inspect his daughter with him. “Could you back up just a bit? I need to be able to feel their temperature and I can’t do that with your hot breath in my face.”

If he was offended he showed no signs as he took a step back. He was about to introduce the second kit but Cinderheart beat him to the punch. “The next one is Honeykit, named after my sister of course. It just seemed appropriate that we both honor family since it is so important to us both.” She paused as she gazed fondly at her kit. “Her fur is the exact same color as Lionblaze’s.”

Jayfeather checked her as well and she seemed to be fine, so he moved on to their last kit, who was quite a bit larger than the other two. He remembered the battle it was to bring him into the world, but now he was peacefully feeding from Cinderheart.

“Icekit,” Lionblaze stated. “He is as white as Cloudtail, but built just like me. Looks almost a week or two older than the girls already.” Jayfeather could hear the pride in his brother’s voice as he spoke. As foul a mood as he was in this morning it warmed him to be there with his brother, and even more so being there the night before and helping the birth. A clan is only as strong as it’s warriors, and Jayfeather knew that ThunderClan just got three of the finest right here.

“They are 3 very strong and healthy kits. Congratulations to the both of you.” He tried to put as much happiness as he could in his voice as he said it for he did not want to disappoint Lionblaze. He felt Lionblaze press his muzzle into his side then left the two of them to be with their kits.

As he was leaving the nursery he could hear a bit of commotion going on near Bramblestar’s den. Curious as to what has the clan stirred up now he decided to head to the fresh-kill pile so that he could get closer and listen in. He nosed through the pile and pulled out a small vole and picked at it as while Squirrelflight was giving her report from the Dawn patrol.

“It has to be a rogue,” she was saying. “The scent wasn’t familiar, not like any clan scent.”

“But the scent did cross over into WindClan territory,” Dustpelt replied, “and there were remains of fresh kill. I still say we cross over and tell WindClan make sure they keep their paws in their own territory. Even if it is a rogue they could still use a good strong reminder. You all know how Onestar can be.”

Several of the cats yowled in agreement but many more dismissed the idea. Bramblestar was obviously giving the patrol a chance to give him all of the facts as well as their opinions before making his decision.

“We will not be crossing the border today, not unless we have definitive proof,” he finally decided. “But we will make sure to give them a strong warning the next time we meet on the island. And we will double our patrols along the border and where the rogue has been scented.”

Jayfeather thought the decision was wise and was about to head back to his den and giving up on the vole when he heard Dovewing approaching. She was just saying good morning to Ivypool and was obviously heading straight towards Jayfeather. There was no escape, another cat wanted to talk to him.

“Hi Jayfeather. What do you think about the rogue?” she asked in hushed tones. “Do you think it is dangerous? Do you think I should try looking for it? I have been working on keeping my senses focused on what is just around me so I don’t get too overwhelmed, but if you think it is a good idea I will see if I can find it.”

Jayfeather could sense a bit of excitement in her as she spoke, and part of him couldn’t blame her. Since the great battle with the Dark Forest and everything leading up to it daily clan life has seemed rather dull. But she shook his head as he replied. “No, it is just a simple rogue. It will be found and chased off like the rest of them.”

Bumblestripe trotted over and sat next to Dovewing. “Hey guys. So you heard? Looks like we may have to have words with WindClan. I wouldn’t put it past those mouse-brains to cross over here and steal our prey.” He leaned closer to Jayfeather before asking “Has StarClan given any warnings?”

Jayfeather rolled his eyes as he stood up. “StarClan wouldn’t know what was happening down here if they came down here themselves and let it bite them on their tails. They guess right sometimes, that’s about it. I wouldn’t worry about what they have to say and worry about living cats are doing here.”

Bumblestripe looked confused as he listened to him. “But don’t you have like, a special connection to them or something? How can you think they don’t matter? Even Cloudtail thinks they matter now.”

Jayfeather turned his back on them and walked back to his den. “Trust me. They don’t know any better than you or I. They didn’t get any smarter by dying.” He could tell that other cats were standing around and listening to him but he didn’t care. He simply went into his den and hoped that the rest of the clan would give him some peace and quiet.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

The scent of warm milk filled the nursery, but the warmth of his mother's fur was not there, causing Icekit to rouse from his slumber. He yawned and looked around the nursery, seeing only Daisy cleaning in the far corner. Her eyes shone as she turned to look at him, the sun breaking through the brambles making them look much brighter than normal. "Well good morning, sleepyhead," she meowed cheerfully. "You know what they say? The early cat catches the mouse! Cinderheart just took your sisters to the fresh-kill pile for the first time. If you hurry you can catch them there."

Icekit thanked her and made his way into the stone hollow, watching in awe as the warriors performed their duties. Even though he was much bigger than his sisters he felt quite small next to the seasoned cats that were milling around the camp. Berrynose and Poppyfrost were sharing tongues near Highledge. Dovewing and Ivypool were just entering the camp with fresh kill in their mouths. And Cinderheart was with Lionblaze as they picked out small pieces of prey for Hollykit and Honeykit.

"Hey Icekit," some cat called from the warrior's den. Icekit turned to see Cloudtail emerging from beneath the branches of the fallen tree that made up most of their den. "How about I show you some battle moves? With the size of your paws I can tell already that you are going to be a fearsome warrior. Why not get a head start, right?"

Icekit shook his head. "Thanks, Cloudtail, but I am already planning on playing with Honeykit and Hollykit after I eat. But another time maybe, okay?" This, of course, was not entirely true. He was planning on playing with his littermates later, but he only just came up with that plan when Cloudtail offered to show him some battle moves.

Cloudtail trotted past him as he responded. "Sure thing! I'm

always willing to help the next generation of strong warriors." As he passed Icekit he approached a pair of apprentices and started showing them some attack moves. Icekit just rolled his eyes before joining his littermates at the fresh-kill pile.

Hollykit and Honeykit were sharing a small shrew and had it nearly devoured by the time he had joined them there. Honeykit looked up at him, joy in her eyes and part of the shrew hanging from her mouth. "Isn't this awesome?" she exclaimed excitedly. "We are out eating with the rest of the clan now! Soon we will be apprentices!"

Hollykit batted her playfully with her paw as she swallowed her last bite of shrew. "You mousebrain, we are still moons away. We would get our ears torn off if we tried training with the other apprentices."

Honeykit swatted her in retaliation, "Not Icekit. He is nearly as big as an apprentice already, which means we will be, too. And I plan on being the best warrior ever! I am going to fight like Lionblaze and hunt like Sandstorm!"

Icekit laughed at them as he started eating a piece of mouse that Cinderheart put in front of him. "Will you two cut it out? Let's just enjoy being kits while we can! You want to play tag when we are done eating?"

Hollykit hopped up onto all four paws and tagged Icekit quickly. "We are starting now! You're it!" She purred as she ran off with Honeykit hot on her tail.

Icekit purred with amusement as he took quick bites of his mouse, eager to chase his littermates. Suddenly the sun was blocked out and the shadow of a large cat engulfed him. He looked up to see Lionblaze standing above him.

"I know you are anxious to grow up, but eating that fast can only lead to choking on that mouse's bones, Icekit." His face showed both humor and concern as he loomed over him. It was easy to see why everyone kept comparing him to his father. His head was shaped exactly like Lionblaze's, and his muscles were already well

defined for a kit. He has that same large paws as well, “great for batting your enemies” as he has been told quite often.

“But I have to go get Hollykit and Honeykit! I’m it!” he mewed in response, his mouth still full of mouse. “If I don’t hurry, it’ll take me ages to catch them!” He took a large bite of the mouse before his Lionblaze had a chance to respond then he took off, calling over his shoulder. “You can have the rest!”

Icekit raced around the camp looking for his littermates. He sped past the nursery then investigated the apprentice’s den but could not find them anywhere. As he ran past the elder’s den he heard a voice from above. “Stop the ShadowClan invader!” Suddenly Hollykit was on top of him and Honeykit came crashing in from the side. He was able to wrestle them off after a few moments and stood facing them.

“Come on! I thought we were playing tag!” he pleaded with them.

“But we want to play invasion!” exclaimed Honeykit.

“We must be ready to stop ShadowClan at any time!” followed Hollykit.

“When was the last time ShadowClan even attacked us?” Icekit retorted.

Graystripe, who had been sunning himself near by chimed in. “Icekit has a point. ShadowClan really hasn’t been a problem for a while.”

“See!” Icekit responded, sticking his tongue out.

“But,” Graystripe continued, “WindClan has been a royal pain. Who knows when those scrawny mousebrains will decide to invade us again!”

Honeykit looked at Hollykit and screamed. “WindClan invader! I’ll shred you!” She pounced upon her sister while calling to Icekit. “Help me stop this pile of fox dung!”

Icekit just turned and trotted away. “You can handle it, Honeykit. I

am just going to go play something else."

"Suit yourself," she squeaked as Hollykit squirmed free and launched her counterattack. Icekit let out a *mrow* laughed as he trotted away. Spotting a ball of moss near the nursery he headed toward it, batting it with his paw once he got there and chased it again. He continued this makeshift game for a while, batting and chasing the quickly disintegrating ball of moss before jumping on it with a joyful cry.

Brackenfur watched as Icekit played on front of him. "That was a pretty good pounce," he remarked, "probably good enough to catch a wounded thrush, but if you want to pounce on anything larger you really need to thrust with your back legs. And keep your front paws outstretched like this." He demonstrated the move before him then turned to face him. "When you grow up you will be able to take out any cat with a move like that. I've seen many kits come and go and I see much potential in you. Why don't you try that pounce again how I showed you?"

Icekit sighed and performed the move a few times, listening to everything that Brackenfur had to say but his heart just wasn't in it. As the day went on he endured much of the same thing. So much talk about what a great warrior he was going to be. How he would be able to rival Lionblaze in fighting prowess. How ThunderClan would be unstoppable with another warrior like him in the fold. The problem was, Icekit wasn't feeling what they were feeling. Maybe it was just the pressure that was being put on him, but by the time he nestled in next to Cinderheart at the end of the day he felt utterly defeated.

He woke up and it was dark. Completely dark. He turned left and right and saw no light whatsoever. He could not scent Cinderheart or any of his littermates. He did smell rich, earthy smells, just like he assumed the forest smelled like. He stood and tried to take a few steps but just stumbled over the rough terrain. The complete blackness was disconcerting, causing him to start breathing quickly as a panic came over him.

Suddenly, a voice came from the darkness. "Do not be afraid, little one. Nothing here will harm you." The voice was that of a she-cat

but it was unfamiliar to him. He turned to face where it sounded like the voice came from but when he heard it again it came from the other direction. “You are troubled, Icekit. I have come to help you.”

He sat back down so that he wouldn’t trip over a root or branch that he couldn’t see. Was this SatrClan? He had heard others talk about StarClan but nobody had ever mentioned that it was completely dark there. Unless this was the Dark Forest, in which case could he trust the cat talking to him? “H-how can you help me?”

“I am here to tell you that you have a choice,” the cat in the darkness replied. “I have been watching you, young one, and I can see just how uncomfortable you are. But it does not have to be that way. You have options.”

Icekit was confused, but at the same time encouraged. From the stories that were told of the Dark Forest, the cats in there were forced to do things that they didn’t want to do, but this cat was giving him a choice. “I have a choice? But what is it? Do I have to choose it?”

“You don’t have to choose it, no. But I have a feeling that you will; otherwise I wouldn’t have come here.” He heard a slight chuckle in her voice, almost like she was enjoying the mystery in all of this.

“What are you talking about? Why is it so dark? Why can’t I see you?” Icekit had so many questions to ask that his head felt like it was starting to swim.

The cat let out a soft purr and when she responded it sounded like her nose was right in front of his. “My sign to you is the answer. Think about it. Now, wake up!”

Icekit woke with a start, snapping his eyes open and looking all around the nursery. Cinderheart. Daisy. Hollykit and Honeykit. He could see them all. He breathed a sigh of relief as he climbed out of his nest. It was all a dream, and a very peculiar one at that. How was he going to figure out what it all meant? Who could he talk to about it.

Everyone else was still sleeping so he decided a quick walk around the camp would help clear his mind. He knew he shouldn't leave without asking but he didn't want to wake Cinderheart or explain just why he needed to go for a walk. He crept towards the entrance and pushed through the opening as quietly as he could, but the next thing he knew he was being trampled on.

"Watch it!" he said with a purr of laughter once he was sure that he was still in one piece.

"I can't," was the gruff response from Jayfeather as he continued on his way to the elder's den. From the looks of it he was going to remove a tick from Purdy and he wasn't too happy about it. Which, of course, didn't surprise Icekit.

His head drooped as he responded. "Sorry, Jayfeather, I didn't mean .." He stopped mid-sentence. Jayfeather didn't seem to notice as he continued on to the elder's den, but Icekit had figured it all out. Jayfeather couldn't see. Icekit couldn't see in his dream. His choice was clear! He didn't have to fight other cats. He didn't have to think of every cat as his enemy. He could put all of his efforts into helping cats, not hurting them.

"I'm going to be a Medicine Cat!"

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Jayfeather was sniffing the hind leg of Blossomfall who had limped back to camp after taking a tumble while patrolling one of the tunnels in ThunderClan territory. It didn't feel warm and everything seemed to be ok, but he wanted to make sure before saying anything. After a few more moments he was satisfied. "Just a mild sprain. You'll be off of duties for a week to make sure that it is healed properly."

The tortoiseshell cat turned to face him. "Thank you, Jayfeather. I feel like such a mousebrain in there." She looked over his shoulder then heaved a sigh. "Do you think she will ever forgive me?"

Jayfeather knew she was talking about Millie, who had been hovering far enough away to seem disinterested, but he could tell that she was curious as to what happened to her daughter. He shrugged as he gathered up his herbs.

Blossomfall continued. "Do you think maybe I should apologize again? She told me there's nothing to talk about but I can tell she is just as unhappy as I am."

"I'm a Medicine Cat. I heal your wounds, not your relationships," Jayfeather replied before he scooped up his bundle of herbs and headed back to his Medicine Den. And just as expected, Icekit was right behind him.

"Why didn't you give her any poppy seeds? Aren't they good for pain?" Icekit asked.

Jayfeather mumbled his reply with his herb bundle in his mouth. "Because she isn't in discomfort unless she walks."

Icekit bounded up next to him, cheerful as always. "How

could you tell that it wasn't broken?"

"Because I'm a Medicine Cat, that's why," responded Jayfeather irritably.

Icekit asked another question, of course. "Why weren't you nicer to her? She just needed someone to talk to."

Jayfeather pushed the herbs back into their place in the store. "Because I didn't want to talk to her. If I had my druthers I would perform all of my duties without any cat talking to me."

Icekit laughed. "What does that even mean? You're so funny, Jayfeather. Do you think you can show me what catmint looks like? Or maybe I can help you with Briarlight's exercises?"

It had been going on like this for nearly a moon; question after question after question. Ever since he had that silly dream he had been following him around and practically begging him to let him be his apprentice. Jayfeather could only say 'no' so many times before he started getting really mean to the young cat. The only reason that he hasn't bitten his head off yet is because he was Lionblaze's kit.

Jayfeather sighed and tried to make his voice sound as friendly as possible. "No. No, no and no. Look, Icekit, I appreciate that you want to help but I already have plenty of help here. Why don't you go play with Honeykit and Hollykit? Go practice some battle moves."

"But I don't want to train to be a warrior. I want to be a medicine cat!" was Icekit's ever exuberant response. "Why won't you let me?"

Jayfeather rounded on him. "Because I do not need, nor do I want an apprentice! Now if you'll excuse me, I am going to go gather some herbs!" And with that he stormed out of his den, through the camp and out into the forest. He hated losing his patience with Icekit, but the kit just wouldn't accept his fate.

He worked his way down toward the lake, following the

path that he had walked so many times that he could do it in his sleep. The sound of the birds singing in the tops of the trees and the cool breeze blowing through his fur had already taken the edge off of his anger. The inviting sounds of the lake lapping at the shore were calling him forward, leading him to his favorite spot in the entire forest.

He paused before he stepped up to the large tree, listening intently for any movement in the forest. The coast seemed to be clear so he reached into the hollow under the tree and pulled out two fragments of a stick. He traced his claws along the marks that were carved into each piece as he breathed in deeply.

"Oh Rock," he said softly, "I'm so sorry that I broke the stick. It has haunted me every day since. Please come talk to me. Please tell me why I am here. What am I to do now? We have been given more power than StarClan. We defeated the Dark Forest. We saved every clan. But now what?"

He closed his eyes and sighed once more. Both Lionblaze and Dovewing have been able to move on. They are perfectly happy living a normal clan life, but Jayfeather has not been able to handle the transition. He has felt lost and disconnected and not a thing has been able to make him feel at ease. After a few moments of nothing but silence he heaved a sigh. "I am just so lost."

"You're lost? I can take you back to camp!"

Jayfeather turned towards the voice. "Icekit? Is that you? What are you doing here?"

"I-I followed you," he stammered nervously. "I wasn't sure if, well, I don't know. But you said you're lost, right? I can take you back!"

"I am *not* lost," Jayfeather grumbled as he shoved the fragments of his stick back onto the hollow under the tree. "I was just talking out loud, that's all."

Icekit bounded a bit closer? "Oh? Were you talking to StarClan? I would love to be able to talk to StarClan! Getting to talk

to cats that have seen everything! I can't imagine just how-"

"I was *not* talking to StarClan!" Jayfeather snarled as he stalked past the young cat, already tired of answering all of his questions.

"Oh, okay" was Icekit's simple reply. "Hey, can I ask why you were so mean to Blossomfall? Did she do something to upset you? She seemed pretty upset and I thought that maybe as a medicine cat you would want to listen to her and maybe help her try to relax and be happier or something."

Finally, Jayfeather had had enough. He turned around and nearly ran into Icekit as he confronted him. "I have tried to be patient and answer all of your questions, but this is enough. Don't you dare tell me how to be a medicine cat. You are not a medicine cat and you will never be a medicine cat!"

He turned and ran through the trees, not giving Icekit a chance to answer. A short while later he was back in ThunderClan camp, and, after grabbing a mouse from the fresh-kill pile, he went straight to his den, informing Briarlight that he was to be left alone unless it was an emergency.

It wasn't so much the volume of the chatter that was going on in the camp, but the overall feel of the cats that roused Jayfeather from his nap. He was instantly alert and dashed out of the medicine den. "What's going on? Is anyone hurt?"

Ivypool, who was standing nearby, turned to respond. "No, Jayfeather, don't worry. Just a missing kit. I don't think he has been missing very long but you know how the clan gets when a kit goes missing."

Jayfeather felt his heart plummet into his stomach. He trained his ears on each cat that was talking until he pieced together what was happening, and it was just as he feared. Icekit hadn't returned.

“Where’s Lionblaze?” he asked,

“Out looking for him, obviously.” Ivypool replied.

“And Dovewing?”

“Same.”

Jayfeather tried to calm his breathing. With Lionblaze and Dovewing out looking for him, he should be found in no time. But it what condition? He was stupid to have let his emotions get the best of him. He should have grabbed Icekit and brought him back with him.

“Are you alright?” Ivypool asked him. “You look like you are about to be sick.”

Jayfeather simply nodded as he walked away. He had to tell someone that he was the last cat to see him. He had to tell them where it was. He heard Bramblestar and Squirrelflight talking about sending another search party out towards the WindClan border. No doubt worried that the rogue who had been causing trouble along the border was a prime suspect. He swallowed hard and approached the pair.

Squirrelflight noticed him walking over and stopped mid-sentence. “Jayfeather? You look… Have you seen something? Has StarClan given you a sign?”

Bramblestar stepped forward as well. “Let the cat breathe, Squirrelflight. What is it that you have to tell us Jayfeather?”

Just as Jayfeather opened his mouth to respond several yowls of joy were heard throughout the camp. Jayfeather scented Lionblaze at the entrance, and was certain that Icekit was with him.

“Never mind now,” he said to Bramblestar as he turned and walked back to his den, breathing a huge sigh of relief. He could hear the cats clamoring around the returning party as he stopped next to his den entrance to listen.

“He said he was on his way back to camp,” Lionblaze

started, “when he realized he would get in trouble for leaving, so he decided to hunt! D you see the size of that mouse in his jaws!”

There were several shouts of surprise and congratulations as the cats marveled at the kit’s catch.

“That is huge!”

“Haven’t seen one that big in ages!”

“Told ya he’s going to be an amazing warrior!”

“But, he is still in trouble,” chimed in the voice of the ThunderClan leader. “Take your kill to the fresh-kill pile then head straight to the nursery while Lionblaze and I discuss your punishment.”

Jayfeather quickly turned and slipped into the medicine den, not wanting to hear any more. Icekit was back and safe. And he should be punished for leaving without telling anyone, even if he would have come back with Jayfeather. And it sounds like he finally decided to embrace being a warrior. All’s well that ends well.

He ducked his head into the medicine stores and nosed around, taking inventory of the stock. He was going to have to fetch some poppy seeds soon. And maybe even some comfrey. As he backed out and turned to check on his supply of moss he nearly backed into another cat. He knew right away it was Lionblaze.

“Jay? We need to talk.”

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Icekit sat in front of the nursery, watching Hollykit and Honeykit roughhousing with Bumblestripe. They had repeatedly asked him to join them but he just wasn't in the mood for it today. It had almost been a week since his punishment, but it seemed like a lifetime. It was bad enough that he couldn't leave the nursery without supervision, but most of his supervision insisted on him playing 'attack the ShadowClan invaders' or 'sneak into WindClan camp' or several variations thereof. He played some of the games with them, after all he *was* destined to become a warrior, but he always played halfheartedly. No cat could tell though seeing that he was much larger than his sisters and able to easily knock them around without even trying.

Cinderheart, who was sunning herself next to him, nudged at Icekit. "Why don't you join them, Icekit? You aren't going to be a kit much longer; you should get as much playtime in as you can."

"Don't remind me," was the reply that Icekit wanted to give, but he reluctantly nodded and trotted over to join the trio of cats that currently resemble a large, multicolored, furry haystack. He heaved a sigh and put on as bright a face as he could muster. "Got room for one more in there?"

Bumblestripe was about to speak, though hearing him through the purring and laughter might have been difficult, but instead they were all interrupted from a voice calling from above.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting," called out Bramblestar as he stood high above the rest of the clan, watching as cats gathered from all areas of the camp. A blur of smoky gray fur rushed past Icekit and into the pile of wrestling kits next to him.

"Ugh, stop! I look fine!" cried Hollykit as Cinderheart

urgently started to groom her. Honeykit tried to escape but Cinderheart had her tail pinned down. Icekit started to laugh but before he knew it a rough tongue was slicking back the white fur on the top of his head.

"Keep still," Lionblaze commanded between licks.

The Apprentice Ceremony! It had to be! He saw the recognition on Hollykit's and Honeykit's faces as well, but he did not share in their enthusiasm. "Are you sure I will be made an apprentice today? I *am* still being punished for leaving camp without permission."

Lionblaze's face gave nothing away as he shrugged. "We'll find out soon, won't we?" He gave him one more lick then walked towards the gathering cats with Cinderheart. Hollykit and Honeykit joined Icekit as they made their way forward.

"Hollykit," called Bramblestar. She hurried forward as the cats around her steped aside to make a path. "Hollykit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Hollypaw." Icekit noticed that Bramblestar had a hitch in his voice when saying her name, obviously thinking about the cat that he once thought was his daughter. "Your mentor will be Bumblestripe. I hope Bumblestripe will pass down all he knows on to you."

Hollypaw looked around for Bumblestripe, who joined her up front when Bramblestar called his name.

"Bumblestripe," Bramblestar continued, "you are ready to take on your first apprentice. You had received excellent training from Mousewhisker, and you have shown yourself to be loyal and brave. You will be the mentor of Hollypaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to her."

Hollypaw nearly jumped in anticipation of touching noses with her new mentor, causing him to purr loudly. She then raised her head proudly to a chorus of "Hollypaw! Hollypaw!" from the cats looking on.

Bramblestar watched fondly for a moment before he called Honeykit to the front next. She skidded to a halt after dashing to the clearing beneath Highledge. “Honeykit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Honeypaw. Your mentor will be Ivypool. I hope Ivypool will pass down all she knows on to you.”

Ivypool joined Honeypaw under Highledge as Bramblestar went on. “Ivypool, you are also ready to take on your first apprentice. You had received excellent training from Cinderheart, and you have shown yourself to be courageous and trustworthy. You will be the mentor of Honeypaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to her.”

Icekit joined in as the cats called out Honeypaw’s apprentice name, but his mind was still racing. Was he going to be made an apprentice or is he still being punished? And would it really matter? What would be worse, being forced to train to be a warrior or remaining merely a kit while his sisters move into the apprentice den?

He was jolted from his thoughts by the ThunderClan leader, whose dark, amber eyes were staring at him from up on high. “Come on forward, Icekit,” he said with a hint of amusement in his tone. Icekit bounded forward, and couldn’t help but notice a few of the other warriors stepping closer as well, probably all hoping to have the opportunity to teach him how to be a real warrior.

“Icekit, you have also reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed along with your littermates. From this day on you will be known Icepaw.” Bramblestar paused, and Icepaw couldn’t help but notice that the ceremony was much different than Hollypaw’s and Honeypaw’s. “Your mentor will be Jayfeather.”

Icekit, along with most of Thunderclan’s, jaw dropped in shock. Jayfeather pushed his way forward, his face unreadable as he turned towards the rest of the clan.

“Cats of ThunderClan,” Jayfeather began, “as you know, I will not be around forever. So it's time I took an apprentice. I have chosen a

cat who has shown enthusiasm and, well, more enthusiasm. Your next medicine cat will be Icepaw."

Bramblestar nodded with approval as he spoke again. "Icepaw, do you accept the post of apprentice to Jayfeather?"

Icepaw barely let Bramblestar finished before he exclaimed "I do!" and lunged at Jayfeather, purring with excitement.

Jayfeather touched his nose to Icepaw's before saying "Then at the half-moon, you must travel with me to the Moonpool to be accepted by StarClan before the other medicine cats."

"Icepaw! Icepaw!" shouted the rest of ThunderClan once the initial shock wore off. Icepaw beamed proudly. He felt like he could jump over the moon. He was a medicine cat!

After a few days of gathering moss, removing ticks from Purdy, and gathering more moss, Icepaw stood expectantly outside of the medicine cat's den, waiting for Jayfeather to come out and take him to the Moonpool. Even though he was his apprentice, it seemed like the only time that he ever saw Jayfeather was first thing in the morning or first thing at night. But now he was finally going to have a chance to spend some quality time with his mentor.

Finally, Jayfeather emerged from the medicine den after giving Briarlight a few instructions. He walked past Icepaw as he started talking. "Alright, follow me. And don't go wandering off. Even though we are permitted to take this path to the Moopool there have been instances where medicine cats were targeted." Icepaw couldn't tell if Jayfather was joking or just being overly dramatic, but he didn't care.

"I will get to talk to StarClan?" Icekpaw asked?

"Probably."

"Will all of the medicine cats be there?"

"Maybe."

"And we get to do this every half moon?"

“Yeah.”

“Do you talk to the other medicine cats a lot?”

“No”

After several more questions, all answered with one word answers, they met another cat along the stream heading to the Moonpool. The brownish-gray cat approached Jayfeather, who hurried along to meet him, not even trying to hide the fact that he was just trying to get away from Icepaw. Icepaw didn’t care because he was too excited to meet another medicine cat.

“Hey Kestrelflight,” Jayfeather muttered as the two cats started walking side by side. “Any sign of the others?”

“Nope. They may be there already though. Who’s the ‘paw? Don’t tell me you took on an apprentice.” Kestrelflight glanced back as they continued on, “I didn’t figure you for the mentoring type.”

It was obviously a joke, but of course Jayfeather didn’t laugh. “Yes. So how are things in WindClan?”

Icepaw’s focus drifted away from the cats as they neared the Moonpool, the terrain becoming rockier as they climbed a hill. Soon they were walking down a path that Icepaw could swear was worn down by years and years of paw prints. And his jaw dropped when he caught sight of the Moonpool, reflecting the half moons radiance all around. Three other cats were waiting for them at the pool’s edge.

“About time,” chimed in one of them, a brown tabby tom. “I thought we were going to have to send out a rescue party!”

“Never mind Littlecloud,” Kestrelflight said loudly. “He thinks he has a sense of humor.”

All of the cats laughed as they gathered. All of them except Jayfeather of course. A sleek, dark gray tabby she-cat approached him and spoke brightly. “Are you Kestrelflight’s apprentice? How exciting this is for you! I am Willowshine, and this is my mentor Mothwing.”

“When it comes to this Moonpool, you are the mentor, WIllowshine,” Mothwing said with a chuckle.

“No, I am Jayfeather’s apprentice! I’m Icepaw!” Icepaw exclaimed proudly.

The other three cats couldn’t hide the shock on their faces, but Jayfeather ignored them all and stepped forward. “As has been long tradition, I am here to confirm this cat’s wishes in front of StarClan. Icepaw, is it your wish to enter the mysteries of StarClan as a medicine cat?”

Icepaw tried to control his emotions which were bubbling up inside of him like a hot spring erupting from the ground. “I do!”

“Then come forward,” Jayfeather continued. Icepaw joined Jayfeather as the rest of the medicine cats formed a half-circle around them. “Warriors of StarClan, I present you with this apprentice. He has chosen the path of a medicine cat. Grant him your wisdom and insight so that he may understand your ways and heal his Clan in accordance with your will.”

Icepaw stood proudly, expecting to hear his name called, but instead Jayfeather had crouched down near the Moonpool. “Touch your nose to the Moonpool, Icepaw.” Jayfeather said softly. As he joined Jayfeather by the Moonpool the other cats crouched down as well, some taking a few laps of the water, then all of them closing their eyes. Icepaw followed their lead.

The water was colder then expected and Icepaw forced his eyes closed tightly. After a few moments he began to relax but everything was still dark. He was starting to fear that he did something wrong so he opened his eyes to peek around but what he saw was not the Moonpool but a vast forest.

“Bet ya didn’t think you would ever get to this point, did you, Icepaw,” a soft familiar voice purred. “It is great to finally meet you.”

Icepaw turned to find a smoky she-cat whose pelt seemed to shimmer along with the stars in the sky. “Who are you?” he asked.

Are you from StarClan?"

"Yes, I finally am," she said with a chuckle. "I am Cinderpelt, and I was once a ThunderClan medicine cat just as you are."

Icepaw approached here agerly. "I have so many questions for you! I don't even know where to start! I'm so excited!"

Cinderpelt chuckled again. "Oh, I am sure you do, Icepaw. But now is not the time. You have many moons ahead of you to learn the 'mysteries of StarClan', but for now you have to just listen. My message to you is simple. Have faith. And be patient. He will need you more than he could ever imagine."

Icepaw tilted his head as he pondered the message. "Who? Jayfeather? He doesn't want anyone's help as far as I can tell. Can't you tell me more? Anything?"

Cinderpelt purred as she walked away. "Patience, little one! Patience!"

"Patience," Icepaw sighed. "Not my strong suit."

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

The yowling was horrendous. The groaning was loud enough that StarClan could hear it. A first time mother having a difficult kitting would be embarrassed if she made this much of a racket.

“Graystripe, will you stop it already. You just ate a little too much,” Jayfeather scolded. “What made you think you could eat a third vole?”

“I have eaten more than three before, Jayfeather,” Graystripe moaned, “so one of them must have been bad. My stomach *hurts*!”

Jayfeather rolled his eyes as he pressed his paws lightly against Graystripe’s stomach, then around his sides. “You’re not as young as you used to be. You’re going to have to come to grips with that. Soon you are going to be keeping Purdy company.”

Millie stepped forward. “That is nonsense. Graystripe is as sharp and skilled as the day I met him.”

Sandstorm, who had been lurking nearby, chimed in as well. “Watch who you are calling old, Jayfeather. Graystripe and I trained together, and I promise you I am nowhere near ready for that elder’s den.”

Millie purred with amusement but Jayfeather ignored then and turned to Icepaw. “What do you think, Icepaw?”

Icepaw tilted his head as he often did when he was thinking. “Mallow leaves would work, as would juniper berries. We have plenty of juniper berries here so I would say we use them!”

Jayfeather had to admit that Icepaw learned quickly. But-

“Are you sure he doesn’t have something else wrong with him? Maybe he was poisoned? Or maybe he has an infection? Or maybe he hurt himself training and he is just feeling the pain now?”

But he questioned everything. “He has no fever. No chills. And Graystripe has trained for moons.”

Graystripe moaned again. “I am right here you know.”

“Plus Graystripe is smart enough not to eat something that he shouldn’t.”

“Thank you.”

“But not smart enough to stop eating when he should.”

Graystripe groaned again. “You may have a point.”

Jayfeather motioned towards the medicine den. “Icepaw, go grab two juniper berries and take them to the warrior’s den. Make sure Briarlight checks them before you leave. Graystripe, I want you to go lay down in your den. Take both berries and try to get to sleep.”

“Come on, Graystripe. I’ll help you,” Sandstorm offered. Together they slowly made their way to the warrior’s den, Sandstorm playfully teasing her old friend the whole way there.

“He’s worried, you know,” Millie commented.

Jayfeather turned towards her. “Huh?”

“He’s worried that he *is* losing a step. He wants to be a warrior for as long as he can be, but he can tell that he’s slowing down.” Millie sighed as she pawed the ground.

Jayfeather shrugged and started to walk away, but for some reason he could hear Icepaw telling him to say something nice. Jayfeather stopped and pondered it for a moment. “Tell him not to eat as much and he will feel faster.” Good enough. He nodded and headed back towards the medicine den.

Briarlight was dragging himself out when he arrived. “Do you mind if Icepaw helps me with my exercises today? Unless you have something planned for him.”

Jayfeather nodded. A few hours of not having to answer questions sounded perfectly fine by him. “Go right ahead.”

Briarlight continued off, calling back over his shoulder. “Great! Figured since you will be spending time with him at the gathering you wouldn’t mind sparing him for this.”

The gathering was tonight. Jayfeather had nearly forgotten it, which is surprising since Icepaw brings the topic up every other day.

Jayfeather ducked into the herb storage and sniffed around. He was looking forward to the meeting because he wanted to talk to the other medicine cats about the state of their stores. It seemed to creep up out of nowhere but due to rotting and low yield this year he was nearly out of Catmint and completely out of Tansy. With leaf-bare quickly approaching he needed to resupply, but the normal places he went for Tansy yielded nothing. Hopefully it was just in ThunderClan territory that these precious herbs were in low supply.

Later that evening the cats had all gathered in the center of camp, eagerly awaiting the trip down to the island. Icepaw was, thankfully, over chatting with Hollypaw and Honeypaw when the clan started to move out. The night was crisp and clear and looked to be a great night for a meeting.

As they trotted through the forest Lionblaze slowed down so that he could walk next to Jayfeather. “How is Icepaw doing?”

“Alright,” Jayfeather mumbled.

“Just alright?”

Jayfeather nodded. “He’s smart. Learns fast. Doesn’t get in the way too much.”

“Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Taking him as your apprentice. I still remember that day. The despair in his eyes when we found him in the forest with that mouse. I could barely stand it.”

Jayfeather shook his head and purred in amusement. “You always were a feeler, Lionblaze.”

“One of us has to be.”

They laughed together as they neared the island, reminiscing about good times. When they got to the fallen tree Lionblaze jumped up to cross first. Jayfeather appreciated that about Lionblaze, not always fussing and letting him make his way on his own. He jumped onto the tree and crossed, digging his claws in until he got to the other side.

“This is so exciting!” a voice called out behind him. “I thought I was going to fall off the tree!” Icepaw had bounded up to him and Jayfeather could feel the excitement radiating from the young cat.

“Yes, exciting. We get to hear a bunch of cats brag about which clan is best. I am so excited I could barely contain myself.”

Icepaw laughed but didn’t say anything else, which might be a first for him. The two of them entered the clearing and Jayfeather led them to where the medicine cats usually met. ThunderClan was the last clan there so the other Medicine cats were already talking.

“She is only four moons old but she is already showing excellent memory of the herbs,” Littlecloud was saying. “I just hope Rowanclaw lets her be my apprentice after Flametail, well, you know.”

Jayfeather couldn’t help but remember that day that he couldn’t save Flametail, but he pushed that thought aside. “You hadn’t mentioned that Tawnypelt had more kits.”

Littlecloud’s tail twitched uncomfortably. “I wasn’t sure if you would care at all.” He opened his mouth like he was going to speak again but they were interrupted by the start of the gathering.

Bramblestar was starting.

“Everything is well in ThunderClan. The clan is strong and well fed thanks to our skilled hunters. We have three new apprentices, Hollypaw, Honeypaw and Icepaw.”

The cats all called out the new apprentice’s names, ThunderClan calling out the loudest of course. But Bramblestar wasn’t finished.

“We still have the issue of a rogue cat hunting in our territory. One cat is not enough to disrupt our food supply, but it is still stealing from us, and any cat caught stealing our prey will be punished severely, be it a rogue cat or a clan cat posing as a rogue cat.”

There were hushed murmurs among the cats in attendance but they were quickly silenced when Onestar stepped forward and spoke.

“I certainly hope you aren’t insinuating that we are going after your puny mice, Bramblestar. I will not let you call my clan thieves!”

“Awfully quick to defend yourself, Onestar,” Bramblestar sneered. “Guilty conscience?”

At once there was yelling and screeching all throughout the gathering. Cats were getting in each other’s faces and hissing at each other like they just realized that they had been hanging out with their worst enemy. Tempers were escalating quickly, but another voice chimed in.

“Settle yourselves before we upset StarClan!” called out Blackstar, much weaker than the strong, white cat normally sounds. “The truth will come to pass as it always does, and once that happens justice can be served.”

The most senior of the clan leaders was able to calm the crowd and started to talk about his own clan, but Mothwing leaned over to Littlecloud and whispered. “Is it just me or did Blackstar sound a little hoarse.”

Littlecloud nodded. “He is fighting off whitecough. So far that is all he has, but if it gets worse we will have a big problem. We are completely out of both catmint and tansy, and I haven’t been able

to find any in our territory."

Jayfeather quickly lost interest in the rest of the gathering and joined in the conversation. "We are out of tansy as well, which is odd because we always seem to have it. Our catmint is dangerously low, too."

"Ours as well," Mothwing added.

Kestrelflight pawed at the ground but finally spoke up. "Onestar has asked me not to talk about the state of our herbs because he doesn't want us to seem weak." He didn't say anything else but from the look he gave it was obvious that they were having the same shortage.

"We should all be asking StarClan for guidance with this, right?" Mothwing said after a few moments of silence. Jayfeather used to be able to count on Mothwing for a good joke about StarClan now and then, but after she witnessed dead cats fighting other dead cats she has been fully on board with StarClan.

"I agree. And we should try to keep in touch. This affects all of the clans. Littlecloud added.

Kestrelflight nodded as well. "I will try to get Onestar to ease up on his restrictions. I don't like to talk negatively about our leader but he is one paranoid cat."

"We'll talk to StarClan, too! Jayfeather is really good at talking to them! I am sure we will be able to help!" chimed in Icepaw.

Jayfeather wrapped his tail around his apprentice's mouth. "Yeah, we will do what we can."

The rest of the gathering went on without any incidents and soon they were trekking through the forest on their return trip to camp. Icepaw was talking to anyone who would listen to him the entire way back and Jayfeather was never happier to see his den and lay down. But no sooner did he lay down then he was staring into the face of his former leader once more.

"Firestar?"

“Hi Jayfeather,” he responded brightly. He stood there staring at Jayfeather, which to be honest made Jayfeather a little nervous.

“What is it?

“Don’t you have something to ask me?”

“If you have something to say to me why don’t you just say it.”

“When are you going to learn to ask for help?

Jayfeather sighed. “I do ask when I really need it. But if that is how you are going to be, then fine. Firestar, we need catmint and tansy. Can you help us?”

“Yes,” was his simple reply.

“Will you?

“Of course. There is some catmint and tansy at a twoleg place just outside of ThunderClan territory. Enough for all four clans to survive leaf-bare.”

Jayfeather was expecting something more complicated. Dealing with Firestar is turning out to be much easier than dealing with Yellowfang. “Great. Thank you.”

“Take your apprentice.”

“Wait. What?”

“Take your apprentice with you.”

“But he can stay and learn from others while I go. I can take Dovewing if I really need to take someone.”

“Take your apprentice.”

Jayfeather changed his mind. Firestar was annoying, too.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

Icepaw could hardly contain himself. He was barely a moon into his training and he had talked to StarClan, been to a gathering, and now was going on a quest! If Bramblestar would allow it of course.

“Tell me again why it has to be you that goes?” Bramblestar asked. He and Squirrelflight were sitting in his den listening to Jayfeather explain it all.

“Because I got the message from StarClan,” Jayfeather explained. “This is something that is affecting all clans an all medicine cats. No cat is going to interfere with us while we do this. StarClan told me where to find the catmint and tansy, not any other cat. So it is meant to be my mission.”

Icepaw hadn’t seen Jayfeather this excited about anything in his entire life. Of course, his entire life hasn’t been that long, but it is still something.

“And you are taking Icepaw with you? No other cats?” Squirrelflight asked. She sounded more like a worried mother than a clan deputy. “I am sure we can spare another warrior.”

Jayfeather just shook his head. “Just Icepaw will be fine.”

Bramblestar got up and poked his head out of his den, looking up at the sky. “It has been a warm leaf-fall, but that doesn’t mean that we won’t have a harsh leaf-bare. We need those herbs, as do the other clans. Gather up what you need and leave early tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Bramblestar.” Jayfeather led the way out of the den and Icepaw followed him closely. When they got to the base of Highledge Jayfeather stopped. “I’m going to go ask Leafpool and

Brightheart to take care of things while we are gone. Go have Briarlight help you make some bundles of traveling herbs."

"You got it!" Icepaw chirped and he bounded into the medicine den.

"So you are going?" Briarlight asked when he skidded to a halt.

"Yup! Leaving first thing in the morning. Jayfeather asked me to get your help making some traveling herb packs."

Briarlight pulled himself up. "Gladly. Do you have any ideas what you will need?"

Icepaw tilted his head as he thought. "Sorrel, daisy, chamomile, aaaand-" Icepaw knew there was one more but the name was escaping him.

"Burnet," finished Briarlight.

Icepaw wanted to kick himself. He should have known. He wanted to be perfect for Jayfeather and this mission and he was already messing up.

"Don't sweat it, Icepaw. You're just nervous. Let's get those packs together then you go play with Honeypaw and Hollypaw. Get that nervous energy out of you."

Icepaw nodded and did just that after they got the packs ready. The rest of the day was a blur of activities and before he knew it he was being roused by Jayfeather.

"Time to go, Icepaw. Come eat your herbs."

Icepaw jumped out of his comfy moss and eagerly gobbled up the bitter tasting herbs. He said goodbye to Briarlight then dashed into the apprentice den to say good by to his sisters. Jayfeather was waiting by the entrance, flicking his tail in anticipation when Icepaw bounded past him and through the brambles into the forest.

They turned up a well trodden path and worked their way into the forest. Icepaw felt like he would burst I he could not control his excitement. “How long do you think it will take to get there?

“I don’t know,” replied Jayfeather.

“Do you think we will have to cross a thunderpath?”

“I don’t know.”

“Will we meet any other cats on the way?”

“I don’t know.”

Icepaw bounded forward, raced around a tree, chased a bird, leaped off of a stump, and skidded back next to Jayfeather. “I can’t believe I am going to leave the clan territory! How many times have you left it?”

Jayfeather stopped and turned his head. If Icepaw didn’t know any better he would have thought that Jayfeather was looking far off into the distance. “A few times,” he murmured. “And you may want to try and slow down a little. You don’t want to tire yourself out so early on.”

Icepaw nodded. “You got it.” He tried to keep his trot in sync with Jayfeather’s as they neared the edge of their territory. One of the first things he ever did as an apprentice was go on a tour of the territory with Hollypaw and Honeypaw, but that seems like it was a whole other lifetime.

Once they left their territory Jayfeather stayed closer to Icepaw. Icepaw found it much easier to keep a slower pace when he realized he was leading Jayfeather through unfamiliar territory.

“Do we know exactly where we are heading?” he asked Jayfeather.

“Not exactly,” Jayfeather answered. “There are twoleg nests further on. Usually the twolegs only live in them during greenleaf. We’ll check there first and keep moving on if we don’t find

anything."

After another hour of walking and a brief rest they came across a small cluster of twoleg nests. One by one they investigated around the empty nests but found no signs of tansy or catmint, by Icepaw was able to catch a small mouse to share with Jayfeather.

They continued on as the sun started to hang lower in the clear sky. Icepaw couldn't help but be awed by all of the new sights and sounds the trip had already provided him. And then they came across his first thunderpath.

Jayfeather stood calmly at the side of the foul smelling surface, keeping perfectly still. Icepaw, however, was having trouble with the stillness?

"When do we go? Do I run as fast as I can? Do you want me to look for monsters? What do they look like?"

"Hush!" hissed Jayfeather. "I'm listening."

Icepaw tried to keep perfectly still, his mouth clamped shut as he watched Jayfeather's ears twitch.

"When I say run, we run without stopping until we're well clear," Jayfeather ordered. "This thunderpath doesn't seem busy but monsters can come from nowhere."

Icepaw nervously looked back and forth along the thunderpath, but suddenly Jayfeather shouted "Run!" and they both took off running. Icepaw skidded in the rocky dirt that surrounded the thunderpath and turned to see Jayfeather stopping right next to him.

"Good," Jayfeather huffed. "Now let's find a good place to rest for the night."

Icepaw looked all around and spotted some brush in the distance. They headed towards it and, once there, Icepaw cleared out a little hollow while Jayfeather plucked up some soft grass to use as nests. Icepaw settled in his and closed his eyes. Then he looked at Jayfeather who has his nose tucked under his tail.

“I’m having a great time here with you,” Icepaw remarked.

“Great. I aim to please,” was Jayfeathers muffled reply.

The sun was shining brightly as they continued their journey the next morning. It took him a while but Icepaw caught another mouse for them to share to help keep their stomachs from complaining. They crossed a stream along the way and passed several dark, scary looking trees that would fit right in ShadowClan.

“What’s your favorite thing about being a medicine cat?” he asked Jayfeather.

Jayfeather didn’t respond at first. He kept his head down as they trudged through some tall grass. “I don’t know. I didn’t even want to be a medicine cat.”

“You didn’t?”

“It was pretty much the only thing I could really do. I guess you can say that fate wanted me to be a medicine cat.”

“But you like doing it now, right?”

Again Jayfeather took a while to reply. “I guess. I didn’t want to do it at first but being able to help cats sort of grows on you. Then the whole prophecy thing took over and I was so focused on that that I didn’t really think about being just a normal medicine cat.”

Icepaw had heard some talk about the prophecy from Lionblaze but still didn’t really understand it. But he could tell by Jayfeather’s voice that it meant the world to him. He spoke of the prophecy like speaking of a friend who has long passed.

“You’re a really good medicine cat, you know,” Icepaw offered.

Jayfeather actually laughed. “Thanks. I’m glad that a moon of my teaching has made you able to tell the difference.”

Icepaw shook his head. “It’s not that. The other medicine cats all look at you differently than they do each other. Like you’re their leader.”

Jayfeather shrugged. “I doubt they think that. They probably just think I am annoying.”

Icepaw laughed this time. “You aren’t annoying. You’re unique. Every cat is! That’s what makes us all special.”

Jayfeather just heaved a sigh but didn’t answer. It didn’t matter though as Icepaw had just seen another bundle of twoleg nests across the field. He bounded off towards them before remembering that he had to steer Jayfeather towards them.

The first two twoleg nests didn’t have anything protecting them so it was easy to search around them for the tansy and catmint. The next nest has a high wall that Icepaw had to climb a tree to get over. He sniffed all around but found no herbs at all. In fact the first few nests barely had anything growing around them.

“Let’s check the nests on the other side of the thunderpath,” Icepaw suggested. He and Jayfeather waited quietly, listening for any sounds. It looked like Jayfeather was just about to say go when they heard it. It sounded like a roar coming from a twoleg nest further down the thunderpath. The monster slowly eased onto the thunderpath then headed straight towards them!

“Don’t worry,” Jayfeather reassured him. “They always stay on the thunderpath.”

Icepaw watched in amazement as the monster sped right past them, the horrid smell blocking out the normally pleasant aromas of leaf-fall. Icepaw looked all around but did not see any other monsters entering the thunderpath from the rest of the twoleg nests, and in a few short moments Jayfeather gave the word and they both scampered across.

Once again the first few twoleg nests didn’t have anything to offer. But when Icepaw jumped onto the low barrier surrounding the twoleg nest that the monster came from his eyes widened. “I can smell it from here! Catmint!”

Icepaw helped Jayfeather to jump up onto the wall and he too smelled the catmint. “I can also smell tansy. This must be the

place."

They hopped down off of the wall and approached a lush looking garden, filled with flowers, rocks, and what appeared to be very small, petrified twolegs in various positions. They walked along the border of the garden and eventually found the herbs they were looking for.

"Great StarClan, I have never seen this much catmint!" Icepaw exclaimed.

Jayfeather sighed a sigh of relief. "We will need to fin some large leaves to bundle it all in if we are to take enough for the rest of the clans."

Suddenly the sun was blocked out by something behind them. As they turned they heard a sneering voice.

"My master doesn't like *anyone* messing around with his garden."

Chapter 7

Chapter 7

"Your master? Jayfeather asked? He could sense the massive cat standing in front of him. He smelled like a combination of twoleg scent and rotting flesh. Needless to say it was not a very pleasant odor.

"Yeah, the hairless one that feeds me. Now are you going to get out of my garden or am I going to have to remove you piece by piece?" The cat snarled.

"We just need some herbs. We can grab what we need and your twoleg will never even know." Jayfeather could feel the heat coming from the cat and knew before he had even finished speaking what the cat's answer would be.

"Out. Now!!" the cat yowled.

They ran for the wall, and with some quick directions from Icepaw, Jayfeather leaped to the top and over it, knowing that the beast of a cat at that twoleg nest could easily fly over that wall and tear them to pieces if he wanted.

"Let's find a place to rest and figure out what we are going to do," he said as he trudged away from the whole reason they went on this trip, his tail drooped and his head hung low.

"There's a bunch of trees up ahead," Icepaw commented, his voice devoid of his normal enthusiasm. "We can probably find somewhere to rest there."

As they rooted around the trees looking for a comfortable spot to rest, Jayfeather couldn't help to think that the two of them should be able to outsmart a kittypet, even if it was a big bully of a kittypet. Icepaw had described what the cat looked like; big, black, a scar over its one eye which couldn't open fully, and some kind of

twoleg object wrapped around its neck that had what looked like bones all over it. So big and dumb, at least that is what Jayfeather was hoping as he developed a plan.

While they were resting and watching the sun start to set, Jayfeather told Icepaw of his plan. “We will sneak in at night. I’ll hide while you start to collect the herbs. If he is asleep, which I’m hoping the kittypet will be, we should have no problem. If he comes out you try to get him to chase you. You say he looks big but I am betting you can outrun him with all of your energy, right?”

Icepaw was silent for a moment but replied. “Yeah, I can, if you think it is best.”

“I think it is the only way. If you can lead him off and keep him busy long enough I can get the rest of the herbs and be gone before he gives up the chase.”

“Alright,” was his reply. He sounded unconvinced, but Jayfeather figured he was just a little nervous. The plan was solid. It would work.

Hours later, after a rest and a meal, the two cats slinked towards the twoleg nest in the stillness of the night. It had cooled off more than the night before but it wasn’t too cold. Still, it might have been chilled enough to keep the kittypet inside of the twoleg’s nest.

They walked around the nest and found a low spot on the opposite side as the garden, a spot that was easier for Jayfeather to get over thankfully. Icepaw had gone back around to jump over where they had before, just in case the kittypet was watching. Better to have only one cat spotted than two.

Once over the wall Jayfeather ducked under a bush and waited. He could scarcely hear Icepaw snipping leaves with is teeth. They had brought several large leaves with them to help carry the herbs that they needed, and hopefully Icepaw would get them filled up and out of there before being spotted.

“I knew you would be back!” the kittypet snarled. It

sounded like the cat was right on top of where Icepaw was, but Jayfeather heard some rustling and the cat call out “I’ll shred you!” as it leapt over the wall, presumably chasing Icepaw.

Once he knew that the coast was clear, Jayfeather hurried over to the garden. He found the leaves already half full of catmint so he started picking the tansy leaves. He couldn’t hear any screeching or yowling in the distance so Icepaw must be leading the burly kittypet in a good chase. He will have to commend him once they are on their way back to camp. He knew it was a good plan.

“Thought you could pull a fast one on me, eh?”

Jayfeather froze.

“I must say, it was pretty clever of you to have the white one draw me out of here, but I’m smarter than you think,” the cat snarled.

Jayfeather shook from head to tail. He turned slowly to face the kittypet even though he couldn’t see him. “Did you kill Icepaw?” he asked feebly, not able to keep the tremble from his voice.

“Nah, I’ll leave that up to Mishka. She’s faster than me, so I’m sure she’s caught the fleabrain by now.” The kittypet laughed. “What, you didn’t think I was going to ask for some help, did you?”

Jayfeather’s jaw had dropped. How could he let this kittypet outsmart him? How could he have been so reckless with Icepaw’s life? How could he face Lionblaze when he came back without Icepaw? If he came back, that is.

“What’s the matter? Mouse got your tongue?” The cat laughed again as it started to pace. “Wait, can you even see me, cat? I will almost feel bad about killing you now.”

“Jayfeather.”

“What’s that?”

Jayfeather had had enough. It was bad enough that he had

led them into this trap, but he was not going to be mocked by this cat. “My name is Jayfeather.”

The large kittypet laughed again. “I don’t care what your name is. Ain’t no one gonna be seeing you again.”

Jayfeather could sense it. He could sense the cat’s muscles tensing. He could already feel his teeth tearing into him. He held his head high, determined to go down with some dignity, but that was when he heard another voice.

“Stop!”

The voice was that of a she-cat, coming from the top of the barrier around the twoleg nest from the sound of it.

“Mishka? What is it? And why did you bring that cat back with you?” the kittypet asked incredulously.

“These are good cats, Gemini,” she started. “You should let them go.”

Jayfeather heard the sound of two cats dropping from the wall, and scented Icepaw as he came closer. “Thank StarClan you’re alright.”

Icepaw settled in right next to Jayfeather. He could scent the fear on him but at the same time he sensed calmness. “I’m glad you are, too. Looks like we got here just in time.”

“Why should I let them go? They are stealing from my master’s garden!” Gemini scowled angrily. “I have every right to rip them to shreds!”

Mishka approached slowly, speaking in a gentle voice. “I was ready to help you, Gemini. I nearly caught the white one, but he squeezed under a bramble patch. I thought I could fit but got stuck. I was trapped and cut and bleeding and hurt. And do you know what happened? That white one came back and freed me. I was intending to kill him and he *helped* me! Look! He put cobwebs on me to stop my bleeding!”

This time when Gemini spoke, there was some tenderness in his voice. “I’m sorry, Mishka. I never thought you would get hurt.”

She purred as she spoke again. “I know, Gemini. And I would have been hurt worse if he didn’t tell me to relax and stop thrashing around. He’s a good cat. They both are. They have been looking all over to find the herbs that are in your master’s garden. They need them to protect their clans. It is like their family.”

“But they are stealing!” Gemini pleaded.

Jayfeather stepped forward. “Please, Gemini. We will not take it without asking. Please let us have these herbs.”

Jayfeather could tell that Gemini was hesitating, but at last he grunted out a “Fine.” Mishka was purring next to him and at last Gemini let out a soft purr. “Yes, yes. Take what you need to help your family. Family is important.”

“Thank you Gemini! You are right! It is!” exclaimed Icepaw.

Jayfeather nodded graciously. “May StarClan smile upon you for your generosity.”

The four cats worked together and quickly filled two large bundles of herbs. They wrapped the large leaves around them tightly, said their goodbyes, and Jayfeather and Icepaw returned to their makeshift nests under the trees.

The next morning Icepaw went off to hunt while Jayfeather was still sleeping. He had been dreaming of dark clouds but when he woke up the sun was shining brightly upon him. Icepaw returned with a plump vole and they ate it together before setting off.

The journey back towards the forest was quiet, just the way Jayfeather liked it. Of course it is hard to ask a myriad of questions when your jaws were clamped around bundles of herbs. Of course carrying the bundles took more out of them and they had to rest more often, but with the successful mission still on their minds they both had an extra spring in their step and made good time.

They had crossed the thunderpaths without incident and

nearly made it back to their own territory when they both couldn't take another step due to exhaustion. They found a long abandoned rabbit hollow and nestled in for the night.

When morning came Jayfeather opened his eyes but things were different. The bright sun had been replaced with gray skies. The cool leaf-fall air had a sharper edge to it. The breeze that had been accompanying them was replaced with a wind that stung just a bit.

"Where did this weather come from?" Icepaw asked?

Jayfeather shook his head. "Leaf-bare is trying to force its way upon us. It is a good thing we are nearly back in our territory."

Icepaw shivered next to him as the wind picked up. "Those clouds in the distance don't look very friendly."

"Then let's get moving." Jayfeather picked up his bundle and with Icepaw next to him they quickly plodded towards home. He leaned more heavily on Icepaw as they traveled, relying more on the young cat to guide him. Icepaw was up to the challenge, his strength never wavering as they weaved in and out of trees and around rocks and over small hills.

Jayfeather stopped and dropped his bundle. His surroundings suddenly felt familiar. "We have just entered ThunderClan territory."

Icepaw dropped his as well and sat next to him. He was breathing heavily but sounded strong as he spoke. "We are nearly home."

Jayfeather purred. "We *are* home. The hard part is over."

That is when the skies unleashed.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8

Icepaw couldn't ever remember being colder. The rain that was falling down chilled him to his very core. The howling wind did little to help as he and Jayfeather hid under a tree.

"We can't just stay out here like this!" Jayfeather called out, his voice barely audible in the wind. "We have to keep moving and find some real shelter."

Icepaw couldn't agree more. The tree that they were huddled under gave them little protection from the wind and the rain. They picked up their bundles and moved on, but they barely made it to the next tree before they were once again huddled up against its trunk.

Once more they ventured out. This time Icepaw lost his grip on the bundle of herbs he was carrying and had to chase it down. Luckily, it did not come unwrapped when it got caught in some brush. He slowly made his way back to Jayfeather who looked like he had fallen in the lake.

"This is ridiculous! How are we supposed to travel like this?!" Jayfeather yowled at the sky. Icepaw figured this had to be even harder for Jayfeather who uses his other senses to move around. The howling wind was blocking his hearing. The rain interfered with his sense of touch. And the whole forest smelled like wet trees, nothing unique about anything anymore.

They crowded into a tiny hollow under a tree and waited for a while, hoping the storm would ease up, but it seemed to only be getting worse. Soon the hollow that they were staying in began to flood and they had to make their way out into the storm again.

Icepaw looked all around him, trying to find something they could use as shelter but he could barely see a few tail-lengths in

front of his face. The icy cold rain was stinging his eyes and his paws felt heavy, caked with mud as they marched on.

While they were resting under another tree Icepaw had a thought. “What about the abandoned twoleg place? That’s not too far from here; we can wait the storm out there.”

Jayfeather nodded as he gripped the bundle of herbs tighter in his jaws. They set out for the empty twoleg nest straight away. What would have been a five minute walk took what seemed like an eternity but they finally made it to the abandoned nest. Once inside they dropped their bundles in a dark corner and collapsed onto the cold, hard ground, drenched and drained of every bit of energy they had.

“I feel miserable,” Icepaw moaned as he curled next to Jayfeather. They started grooming each other, trying to get the excess water off of each other and warm themselves up. After a while Icepaw felt Jayfeather’s breathing slow down and noticed that his mentor had fallen asleep. He closed his own eyes and, now that he was feeling at least a little warmer, drifted off to sleep as well.

The clinking sound coming from all around woke him up. Jayfeather was awake too, and turning his head back and forth. Icepaw got to his feet and ventured towards the entrance of the twoleg nest and looked all around him.

“It is ice! Falling from the sky! Everything is getting coated with it!” he exclaimed. If it wasn’t so cold and trapping them in the abandoned twoleg nest he might have thought that it looked beautiful, but instead it just made him worry even more. “We’re going to be stuck here even longer than I expected.”

Jayfeather was now standing next to him, his tail calmly resting on his back. “We are warm and dry here. There is plenty of prey here as well. Don’t worry.”

Icepaw started to relax as they made their way back towards the center of the room. Now that he was not shivering from the cold and worried that they would never make it home, he

started to explore the nest more closely. It looked like it had not been lived in for a long time. It was big and empty and everything had dirt and dust on it. There were holes in some of the smooth looking walls and the scent of pray was all around.

While Jayfeather was inspecting their herb bundles Icepaw stalked around slowly, looking for a glimpse of anything they could have for a meal. He could hear some scuffling behind the walls and the occasional squeak, and at last he saw a mouse, much larger than he expected. He crouched down and kept his tail low, remembering everything that he was showed as a kit when everyone assumed he was going to be a warrior. He inched closer then waited, bunching up his muscles then springing forth, paws outstretched. The mouse didn't stand a chance, and with a quick nip to its neck it was ready to be eaten.

Icepaw heard a noise and looked. Another mouse was scurrying by. He took a few bounds and caught the mouse quickly, nipping its neck and adding it to his own little fresh-kill pile. In no time he had four mice heaped up in the middle of the room and he and Jayfeather filled their bellies s the storm raged on.

When they were done eating Icepaw explored some more, looking for anything he could use to make a nest. Coming up empty he returned to see Jayfeather curled up against the far wall, licking his paws.

"Are you ok?" Icepaw asked him.

"Just a splinter," Jayfeather replied.

"Do you need any help?"

"No."

"Okay, 'cause I don't mind helping. I like to help!"

"I don't need any help."

"I know, I know." Icepaw sighed. Jayfeather looked at him like he was about to say something but just resumed tending to his paw, so Icepaw went to the other side of the room and laid down,

watching the ice continue to form clear coats around the branches of each tree.

"What was that noise?" Jayfeather asked suddenly.

"What noise?"

"Shh! Listen!"

Icepaw could only hear the ice falling outside at first, but hen he heard what sounded like a really low groaning sound. He looked all around him but could not tell where it was coming from. He then looked over to Jayfeather who was looking straight up. He started to approach him but Jayfeather quickly stood up and shouted "No!"

Suddenly the whole twoleg nest felt like it was shaking. The top of the nest was collapsing and Icepaw had to race out of the way to avoid being covered by the falling debris. He stood in the doorway and watched in horror as the spot where Jayfeather had been standing was now a pile of broken twoleg nest and ice.

"Jayfeather!" Icepaw called out. He raced around the pile, trying to see inside but all he could see was a cloud of dust. "Jayfeather, are you okay? Talk to me! Please! Please don't leave me!"

"Calm down Icepaw," Jayfeather responded, sounding like he was deep inside of a cave. "Surprisingly, I'm unharmed. Though I *am* pinned against the wall here and can't find a way out."

Icepaw began to dig at some of the debris but when he tried to move some of the bigger pieces the whole pile started to tremble.

"Stop! If this starts to collapse then I'm going to be crushed," Jayfeather meowed hurriedly. Then, in a much calmer voice he said "You're going to have to go to camp and bring some help."

"I'm not going to leave you here all alone," Icepaw replied. "There has to be another way. There is always another way."

As he sniffed around the wreckage of the twoleg nest the ice turned back into rain, then started to ease up. The clouds were starting to part and a barley visible moon gave him just a bit more light to work with. The pile of rubble wasn't as bad as it had seemed before, and looked like a few cats should be able to clear a path to Jayfeather fairly easily. As long as they could do it without making it collapse on Jayfeather of course.

"I will be just fine in here. Let's try to get some rest and tomorrow you can go for help," Jayfeather called out from inside.

Icepaw didn't like the idea of leaving Jayfeather trapped in there, but until he could think of another plan it looked like that was what he was going to have to do. He picked a spot that was relatively dry next to the pile and curled into a ball, tucking his nose under his tail. It seemed like moons ago when he was so excited to go on this adventure, but all he wanted to do now was to be in his own den in his safe, warm camp.

That night was full of nightmares for Icepaw. He had tried several times to free Jayfeather from the pile but every time he did it by himself, the whole thing collapsed and Jayfeather was crushed. He also dreamed of racing to camp and bringing all of the strongest warriors with him to help, but every time they returned the pile had already collapsed and Jayfeather was already dead. No matter how fast he ran or no matter how gently he worked he was never able to save his mentor.

When he woke the next morning he felt as exhausted as he did when he first shut his eyes. The first thing he did was call out to Jayfeather. "Are you still in there?"

"No, I decided to go for a swim in the lake. Where else would I be?" was his sharp-tongued reply. Icepaw didn't seem to mind, as long as he was still alive there was still hope.

"I don't think I should leave you. I just have a bad feeling that something would happen if I left. If I stay here and we work together I am sure we can get you out of here."

"And I'm telling you that you can't do it. Go get help,

Icepaw," Jayfeather ordered. Icepaw tried to plead with him some more but Jayfeather refused to listen, so reluctantly Icepaw stepped out of the abandoned twoleg nest and into the forest. He took a deep breath and started to race back to camp.

He didn't get very far when he had to leap over a fallen tree. He had done such things many times before but this time he stopped and turned around to take a look at the tree. It had not fallen the whole ay down because several sticks were positioned just right to hold it in place.

"If I take a bunch of sticks and wedge them under the larger pieces of the twoleg wall that collapsed, it can hold it in place while I remove the smaller pieces! That way I can get him out myself without having to go back to camp!"

Icepaw was proud of himself and, once he looked around to see if anyone would notice that he was talking to himself even though he knew he was alone, he grabbed a large stick and ran back towards the twoleg nest.

He dropped the stick outside of the entrance and hopped inside. "Jayfeather! I know what to-" he stopped suddenly because there was another cat in the twoleg nest, and the look on its face made Gemini look like the friendliest cat in the world

Chapter 9

Chapter 9

Jayfeather figured it would have been better to have been killed by Gemini then to have endured all of this. One swift stroke. One bite and it would have been over and he would be in StarClan, no doubt tormenting Yellowfang for as long as he is there. Or maybe even looking for Half Moon.

But *noooo*. First it was the storm. The rain came from nowhere, chasing them to this stupid abandoned twoleg nest that tried to kill him. He would never forget the sound of the roof collapsing on top of him for the rest of his life, which incidentally might not be much longer.

Then it was his latest visit with Firestar. After Icepaw had gone to sleep the night before Jayfeather decided he was going to reach out in his dreams and try to contact some other cat to come help him. It had been a while since he had done it, but he was sure he could find at least Lionblaze and convince him to bring help. But Firestar would have none of that.

“Go back to sleep, Jayfeather. You have all the help you will need,” Firestar had told him.

“All I have is Icepaw, Firestar.”

“Yes. Now go back to sleep. You will not be visiting any other cat’s dreams tonight.”

And so Jayfeather was forced to rely on his over exuberant apprentice to get to camp quickly and bring help. That should be the end of it right?

Wrong.

Not long after Icepaw had left Jayfeather heard the scented

another cat nearby. It was strangely familiar, yet new, like a cat that he should know had rolled around in mud for a moon to try and cover his original scent.

"Who's there?" Jayfeather called out.

"I've waited a long time for this. And StarClan has granted my wish. I will be able to end you and make it look like an accident. What more could a cat ask for?"

Jayfeather felt chills ripple across his spine when he heard that voice. "Breezepelt?"

"Ah, so you haven't just completely forgotten about me like everyone else has? How touching," was Breezepelt's scathing reply.

"Wait, are you the rogue that every cat has been talking about these past few moons?"

"Another correct answer. You're good at this game. Yes, I was hoping to start a war between WindClan and ThunderClan. Teach you and Lionblaze and my Crowfeather a lesson." Jayfeather could hear the contempt in his voice when he said each name. "Would be easy to take care of you all during a battle and make it look like an accident. But this? I couldn't have asked for anything better!"

"Jayfeather! I know what to-" came a voice from the entrance. Icepaw had returned. Jayfeather wanted to tell the young apprentice to just run but Breezepelt was quicker.

"Get out of here, 'paw. Just pretend like you didn't see anything."

Icepaw, of course, did the exact opposite. "What's going on here? Who are you?"

"Meet Breezepelt," Jayfeather answered from behind the pile of debris. "He doesn't like me too much."

"Why?" was Icepaw's reply.

“Because he is a mouse-brained idiot, that’s why.” Jayfeather meowed.

“I wasn’t asking you,” Icepaw meowed. “Breezepelt, why don’t you like Jayfeather?”

Breezepelt must have turned to face Icepaw because his voice sounded farther away. “Because that pile of fur and his brother ruined my life! I’m going to make him pay for what he did!”

“Just get out of here,” Jayfeather called out. “He’ll let you go. He doesn’t care about you at all.”

Icepaw’s reply stunned him “Shut up, Jayfeather!” he growled. *Shut up Jayfeather?* Icepaw has never talked to him, or anyone, that way before. What was that cat up to?

“I am not going to try and stop you, Breezeplet,” Icepaw went on. “I am going to just sit here between you and him and if you can convince me that Jayfeather deserves to die, then I will not get in your way.”

I’m doomed Jayfeather thought.

“You’re kidding me, right? You’re just going to let me do whatever I want here.” Breezepelt sounded amused. He probably thought it was a big joke.

“Yup. If you convince me he deserves to die,” was Icepaw’s calm response. “So, convince me.”

“You didn’t hear me before? He has ruined my life!”

“How?”

“What do you mean how?! Haven’t you heard? His dad is Crowfeather. My dad is Crowfeather!”

“How did that ruin your life?”

“Isn’t it obvious? My dad never wanted me! He always wanted Leafpool’s kits!”

Icepaw didn't respond right away, like he was mulling something over. "Didn't he find out that they were his kits *after* you were born?"

"Yeah, but-"

"So doesn't that mean he couldn't have always wanted Jayfeather and Lionblaze?"

Breezepelt let out a screech of frustration, one that Jayfeather has wanted to let out many times when dealing with Icepaw, but for once he was just going to sit quietly and let Icepaw handle this. What else could he do? He was stuck.

"Crowfeather always loved Leafpool! That's the problem! He didn't love me or Nightcloud!" Breezepelt eventually screeched at Icepaw.

"So you are saying it *isn't* Jayfeather's fault? So why must he die?" Icepaw asked.

"Because they all do! Their existence has made my life miserable!"

"If none of them existed, then you wouldn't either."

"Better that then having to live in a clan where no one wants you." Breezepelt sneered in response.

"So the whole clan is to blame?"

"Yes! Well, no, but-" Breezepelt faltered, but quickly composed himself. "All of WindClan has been against me since the day I was born. And it all has to do with Crowfeather loving Leafpool."

"So what," Icepaw replied. Even Jayfeather cringed. Breezepelt was sure to shred him for that.

"'So what'?" Breezepelt repeated in shock. "*So what*?! Crowfeather loved a ThunderClan cat! It is against the warrior code!"

“So is killing another cat just because you think he ruined your life.”

“Yeah, but-”

“Two wrongs don’t make a right, Breezepelt. If I were to let you kill Jayfeather here, what would that accomplish? All of ThunderClan would hunt you down. And from the sound of it WindClan wouldn’t be there to defend you much. Crowfeather might be hurt by it. And Leafpool. But what would it really fix?”

Jayfeather waited for Breezepelt’s response, but nothing came.

“Breezepelt,” Icepaw continued, “things happen all the time that we just can’t control. Do you think Jayfeather and I would be here right now if we could help it? We could spend our entire lifetime blaming the weather or blaming this twoleg nest, but what would it accomplish? You are in charge of your own destiny. Do you want to be the cat that blames everyone else for their miserable life or do you want to take your life by the fur and make something positive for yourself?”

Beezepelt sighed. “But all my life I have felt like an un-welcomed cat. One that-”

“Did your clan feed you?” Icepaw interrupted.

“What?

“Your clan. Did they feed you? Take care of you when you were sick? Give you a place to live?”

“Well, yeah but-”

“Your clan is your family. Family takes care of each other. You weren’t ever un-welcomed. Maybe not every cat liked you so much, but look at Jayfeather; I’m sure there are plenty of other cats that don’t like him as well, but he knows he is loved by his clan family.”

“I’m still here you know,” Jayfeather interceded.

Breezepelt sighed again. “Do you think my clan will accept me back? I haven’t been there since I attacked Lionblaze.”

“Of course they will. And if you work hard and take responsibility for your own actions and attitudes, you will see that not everything is as bad as you think it is.”

Jayfeather had to hand it to him. He spoke with more wisdom than any cat his age should. And speaking of wisdom, maybe Firestar was right after all. He would never tell him, of course, but Jayfeather couldn’t have survived this trip with anyone but Icepaw with him.

“I don’t even know where to start. For moons I have been blaming Lionblaze and Jayfeather for, well, everything. Most cats just let me be. They let me stew in my own hatred. Thank you for talking to me, Icepaw.” Breezepelt sounded like a completely different cat. Jayfeather thought there may actually be some hope for that sour tempered WindClan cat.

“You can start by helping me save Jayfeather.” Icepaw stated calmly.

“Are you sure that is a good idea?” Jayfeather asked. “I’m sure a few more cats are needed for this job.”

“Trust me, Jayfeather,” Icepaw replied. And Jayfeather did.

Breezepelt and Icepaw worked together clearing debris away. Icepaw was talking the entire time of course, either telling Jayfeather what they were doing with the sticks or asking Breezepelt questions. And surprisingly, Breezepelt sounded happy to answer each and every one. It had probably been a long time since any cat was eager to talk to him and he was enjoying every second of it.

Hours seemed to pass until finally Jayfeather could see the two cats. They had built an impressive looking tunnel using sticks and other large chunks of the twoleg nest to secure everything in place.

“Hiya Jayfeather!” Icepaw mewed brightly, seemingly unfazed by the amount of work he had done to get them to this point. Jayfeather looked fondly upon his apprentice as they pulled away the last bit of rubble that was in his way.

“The bundles of herbs are right over here,” Jayfeather told him. I grabbed them when the roof started to collapse. I didn’t want to lose them after we went all that way.”

Icepaw grabbed one of them as Jayfeather grabbed the other. Breezepelt was following them out when suddenly one of the sticks broke. Breezepelt shoved both Jayfeather and Icepaw out of the way as a shower of rubble fell upon him.

“No!” Jayfeather and Icepaw said simultaneously. They dug through the rubble to find Breezepelt laying there with his eyes closed. Jayfeather prodded him with his nose and Breezepelt coughed.

“Ow,” he said weakly.

“Where does it hurt?” Jayfeather asked. He started sniffing around him as Icepaw cleared away the rest of the debris. “My back leg. I can’t move it. It hurts.”

Jayfeather touched it gently with his paws, noticing when Breezepelt winced in pain. “It is definitely broken. Come; let’s get you back to ThunderClan camp.”

Breezepelt’s eyes widened. “What? No, they won’t like that too much. I have been stealing prey and trying to cause trouble and-“

“That’s enough,” Jayfeather stated. “I am a medicine cat and I am telling you that I am bringing you back to camp. And when I tell them what happened they will happily let you stay there until you are well enough to go home.”

Jayfeather and Icepaw helped Breezepelt up and kept him between them as they made their way back to ThunderClan camp. They had their herbs in their jaws and a redeemed cat between

them. As far as adventures go, this one turned out to be a pretty good one.

Chapter 10

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The looks on the faces of every cat when the three of them entered ThunderClan camp was priceless. There were looks of relief that they had made it back safely after the storm, which left quite a bit of ice around the camp still. There were looks of shock that they came into the camp with Breezepelt. And there was the look on Lionblaze's face, like he couldn't decide which emotion to show so he tried to show them all.

"What's going on here?" Bramblestar asked as he came down to meet them. "Why do you have Breezepelt with you?"

Jayfeather asked Icepaw to help Breezepelt into the medicine den while he explained everything to Bramblestar. Lionblaze approached them and touched noses with Icepaw.

"I am glad that you made it back safely," he said, his wary eyes looking over Breezepelt.

"Me too!" Icepaw replied happily. "It was an awesome adventure!"

"Yes, but what is *he* doing here?" Lionblaze asked.

Breezepelt responded before Icepaw could. "I'm sorry, Lionblaze. For everything. I have really been nothing but trouble and you have every right not to trust me, but I wanted you to know that I really am sorry."

Lionblaze looked at him curiously then shrugged. "Works for me. Let me help you get him to the apprentices den."

Icepaw stopped him. "No, we need to get him to the medicine den,"

Lionblaze motioned towards the den where several cats

were working. They were twisting brambles and carrying sticks. “The storm did a number on the medicine den, so Bramblestar decided that we should not only fix it but expand it since both you and Briarlight are staying there with Jayfeather.”

“That’s great!” Icepaw exclaimed, jumping in excitement and almost knocking Breezepelt over. “Oops! Sorry Breezepelt. Let’s get you comfortable and then I’ll bring you some poppy seeds for the pain.”

They got Breezepelt settled in the apprentices den and Icepaw had just given him a few poppy seeds to help with the pain and let him sleep when he noticed Bramblestar leaping up to Highledge.

“Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here beneath Highledge for a Clan meeting!" He called out. The cats that were working on the new medicine den put down their sticks and joined everyone else who had already gathered when they saw Bramblestar hop up onto the ledge.

Jayfeather came to sit beside Icepaw so Icepaw quickly told him about the new den before Bramblestar started. “You deserve it,” he said proudly. Icepaw couldn’t imagine feeling better hearing that praise from Jayfeather.

“As you all know,” Bramblestar started, “there has been a rogue traveling along the border between ThunderClan and WindClan. This rogue has eaten our prey and caused some unrest amongst us. In fact we almost came to blows with WindClan at the last gathering.”

There were agreeing murmurs throughout the clan but Bramblestar held his paw up and the discussions quickly stopped. “I have come here to tell you that the rogue is no longer a threat of any kind. After talking with Jayfeather I have decided to forgive him of every act that he has done against us.”

The crowd began mumbling again, this time Icepaw could hear them saying Breezepelt’s name and looking towards the apprentices den. Bramblestar raised his paw again to try to get the

cats to calm down but was having trouble controlling the crowd this time.

"Hey! Shut it! He isn't done yet!" called out Squirrelflight from beneath Highledge. There were a couple of chuckles but everyone quieted down and Bramblestar nodded appreciatively towards her.

"Breezepelt helped to save Jayfeather's life. He has apologized for everything and I have forgiven him. If anyone shows him any hostility they will answer to me."

"And me!" Icepaw chimed in. The cats all around laughed and the meeting was closed. Word quickly spread about the mission and how Icepaw was able to prevent attacks not once but twice just by showing kindness. Bramblestar sent warriors to each of the camps with a bundle of herbs for their medicine cats and soon enough the clan was back to their ordinary routine. And for Icepaw, that was perfectly fine.

It was a calm, warm, late greenleaf night, and Jayfeather and Icepaw were taking their routine trip to the Moonpool, walking alongside Mothwing and Willowshine. Icepaw was his normal, exuberant self. He had spent much of the day with Hollyheart and Honeypelt, who had asked to escort him as he went gathering herbs so they could spend some quality time together. It was always fun to hang out with his sisters, who felt just as he did. Family is important.

They met the other medicine cats who were already standing near the side of the pool. Icepaw walked down the familiar path that was marked with paw prints from cats long since forgotten and was just about to get comfortable, and hopefully have another fun talk with Cinderpelt, when Jayfeather stopped him.

"Before we share tongues with StarClan," Jayfeather began, "I have something to say, and even though it is something that it takes some medicine cats many moons to earn, I feel that for mine it is long overdue."

Icepaw approached Jayfeather and sat next to him. His

paws quivered with excitement as Jayfeather spoke.

"I, Jayfeather, medicine cat of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and with your help he will serve his Clan for many moons."

Icepaw couldn't believe it. He was about to get his medicine cat name!

Jayfeather faced him and continued. "Icepaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?"

Icepaw yowled out his answer. "Oh, I do!"

"Then by the powers of StarClan I give you your true name as a medicine cat. Icepaw, from this moment you will be known as Icestorm. StarClan honors your kindness, your wisdom, and the love you show for *all* cats, and we welcome you as a full medicine cat of ThunderClan."

Jayfeather rested his muzzle on Icestorm's head and Icestorm licked his shoulder. The other medicine cats started shouting out his name. "Icestorm! Icestorm!"

Jayfeather purred then led the way back to the Moonpool. They all touched their noses or lapped at the water and soon Icestorm was in his familiar spot in StarClan with Cinderpelt facing him. He was just about to ask her how she was when another familiar voice startled him.

"May I speak with Icestorm for a moment?" Jayfeather asked. Cinderpelt nodded graciously and walked into the forest.

Icestorm was completely shocked to see his mentor walking in his dream with StarClan. "Is everything alright?" he asked, not really knowing what else to say.

Jayfeather nodded as he approached him and Icepaw suddenly realized that Jayfeather was staring right into his eyes.

“Can you see me here?”

“I can. I have always been able to see in my dreams.”

“I didn’t know that. That is so cool!”

Jayfeather laughed and shook his head. “So, Icestorm, do you like your name?”

Icestorm nodded enthusiastically. “I do! It is because I did such a great job during that storm, right?”

“Not exactly,” Jayfeather replied surprisingly. “I actually gave you that name for selfish reasons.”

“Selfish reasons?”

Jayfeather nodded again and started to walk among the trees so Icestorm followed him. “You may already know this, but I am sort of a stubborn cat.”

Icestorm chuckled softly but let Jayfeather continue.

“For much of my life I have been trying to prove to everyone, or maybe just to myself, that I didn’t need help. I was perfectly capable of doing things myself. My way. And with just a few exceptions I think it has worked out pretty well for me. But if it wasn’t for you and *your* way of doing things I wouldn’t be standing here today.”

Icestorm nodded, unsure of what to say next, so Jayfeather continued.

“I named you Icestorm as a reminder to me that there is always going to be storms that come up. And if I don’t sometimes let other cats help me when I clearly need it,” Jayfeather sighed, “the storm will bury me. You are my reminder, and I am very proud to have you work with me as a full fledged medicine cat.”

Icestorm felt like he could cry. Jayfeather had definitely been a much friendlier cat these past few moons, but he wasn’t expecting this. “Thank you, Jayfeather.”

Jayfeather stood there for a moment longer, then wrapped his tail around Icestorm's and started to wander off.

"Are you still lost?" Icestorm asked before Jayfeather could get out of earshot.

Jayfeather turned with a puzzled look on his face. "Lost?"

"That day in the forest when I suck out of camp. You said you were lost. I didn't understand it then but I do now. Are you still lost?"

Jayfeather shook his head and purred. "No, Icestorm, I know exactly where I am, and exactly where I belong. I belong in ThunderClan. With my family. Being the best medicine cat that I can be."

"Me too," replied Icestorm. "And there is no other place I would rather be."